



“Only 9.3 % of recent UK University Art & Design graduates found a job in their chosen career, 51.3% had no option but to take a job outside of their field of study and 77.6% of graduates say, with hindsight, they would have considered alternative forms of study had they graduated with the newly proposed student debt.”

Following the UK coalition government’s announcement of its intention to increase University tuition fees, 2009 and 2010 graduates of Art and Design were surveyed to elicit their opinions on fee increases, the quality of the University tuition, advice and preparation for employment.



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Creative Graduate Research Report | <http://c-b.me/85>

Skills Online Group Limited | 24/02/2011

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Methodology

Skills Online Group designed an online survey containing 13 simple multiple choice questions each containing an open-ended comments field. The survey link was emailed to approximately 900 UK Creative Arts students who were student exhibitors at the 2009 and 2010 [Free Range Art & Design Show](#) held at the Old Truman Brewery in London. The range of students emailed and those responded were across the Creative Arts spectrum and included all exhibiting Colleges and Universities. The sample is broad and equally distributed amongst the Creative Arts. The sample included students from 15 UK Universities and Colleges for 2009 graduates and 31 Universities and Colleges for 2010 graduates.

The survey was launched on the 9th of February 2011 and was allowed to run for 16 days. The survey was closed on the 25th of February 2011 when 161 respondents had replied. Graduates were incentivised to complete the survey by having a chance to win an iPad in a lucky draw sponsored by Skills Online Group.

Total approached:	Approx. 900 students via email
Total started survey:	161
Total completed survey:	148 (91.9%)

Objectives

- To garner the attitudes and opinions of recent art and design graduates towards the proposed UK University tuition fee increases
- To gain insight into graduate experiences when job seeking in the UK creative industry; launching as freelancers or setting up their first company
- To assess UK Universities integration of *blended education activities

*a mixture of in classroom and online teaching modules

View survey responses here: <http://tinyurl.com/6zw6kg2>

Publishing rights & Distribution:

Link to report on Skills Online Group site: www.skillsonlinegroup.com/graduate-employability-research

For comments, please contact Fraser Black at: fraser@skillsonlinegroup.com

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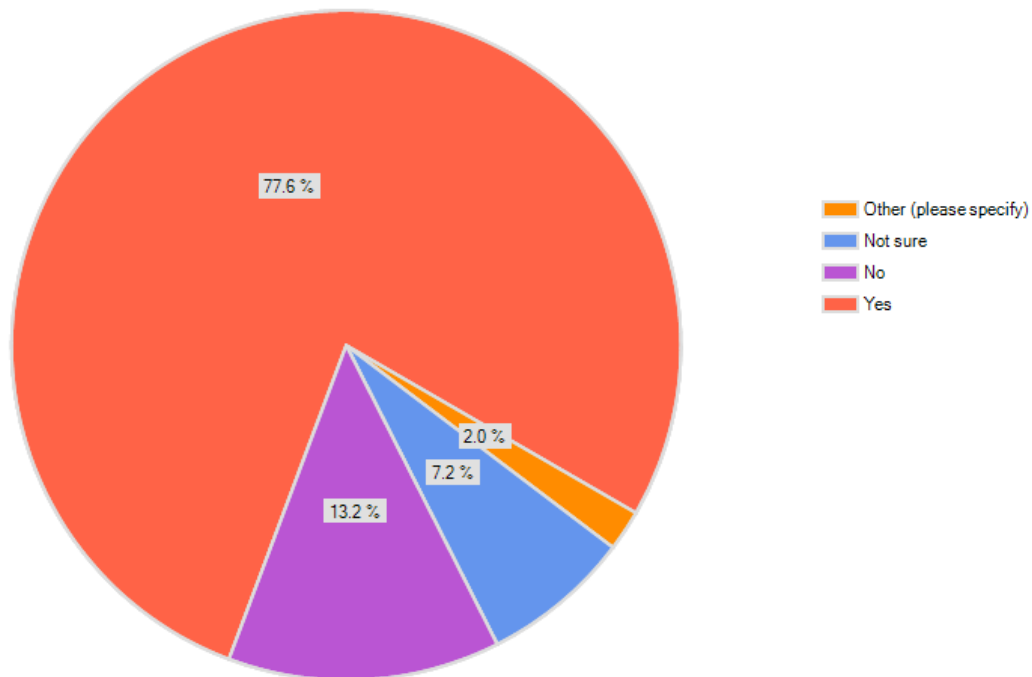
Views and opinions expressed by participating students are not necessarily the views of the Author.



Section 1 – Quality of teaching and value-for-money

77.6% of University Art & Design 2009/10 graduates say, with hindsight, they would have considered alternative forms of study assuming the newly proposed student debt.

Let's pretend it's 2015 and you've just graduated with a Degree in the Creative Arts! Although, you've now got £27,000 of student debt and £10,000 of personal debt due to your living costs not covered by your student grant or loan. Knowing this, would your debt have made you look more carefully at other types of training and education (i.e. Apprenticeships, overseas Universities) before you enrolled on your Degree course?



- Based on student debt levels, 77.6% of the respondents said they would look carefully at alternative types of training and higher education if UK Universities went ahead with their new tuition fee structures.

Comment:

The UK Coalition Government announcement to increase student tuition fees is likely to have an adverse effect on the number of students selecting University as their preferred education and training option.

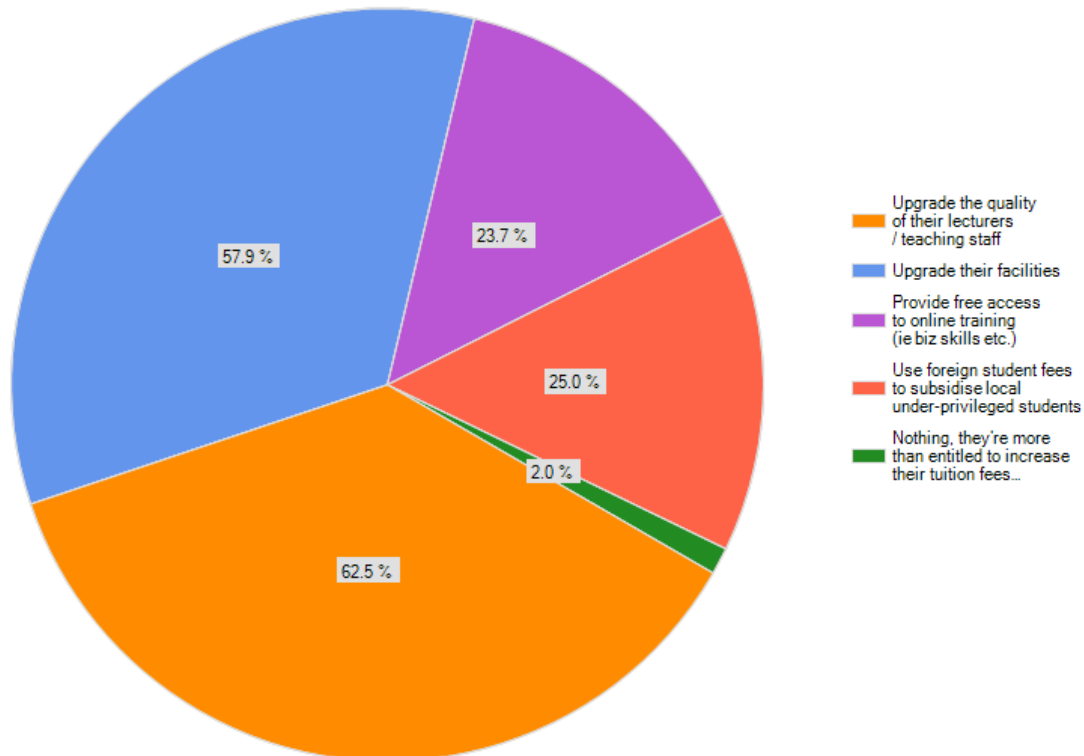
Fast-forward to 2015 and UK Universities will need to market themselves very effectively in order to attract normally anticipated student registrations.

Competition can be expected from new and alternative higher education choices such as online Universities, respected global Universities offering Distance Learning Degrees and traditional Universities based overseas that offer value-for-money coupled with an overseas learning experience.



University marketing efforts will need to reinforce overall value, quality of tuition, the actual number of lecture hours per course, available learning technologies as well as graduate employability and student satisfaction figures.

What should Universities be doing to justify their tuition fee hikes? (Pick the most relevant answer)



- Approximately 60% of graduates felt that Universities should be upgrading the quality of their teaching staff and upgrading their facilities in order to justify the tuition fee increases.
- 1 in 4 graduates felt that Universities should be providing free access to online training for things like business skills.
- 1 in 4 graduates felt that foreign student fees should be used to subsidise local under-privileged students.

Comment:

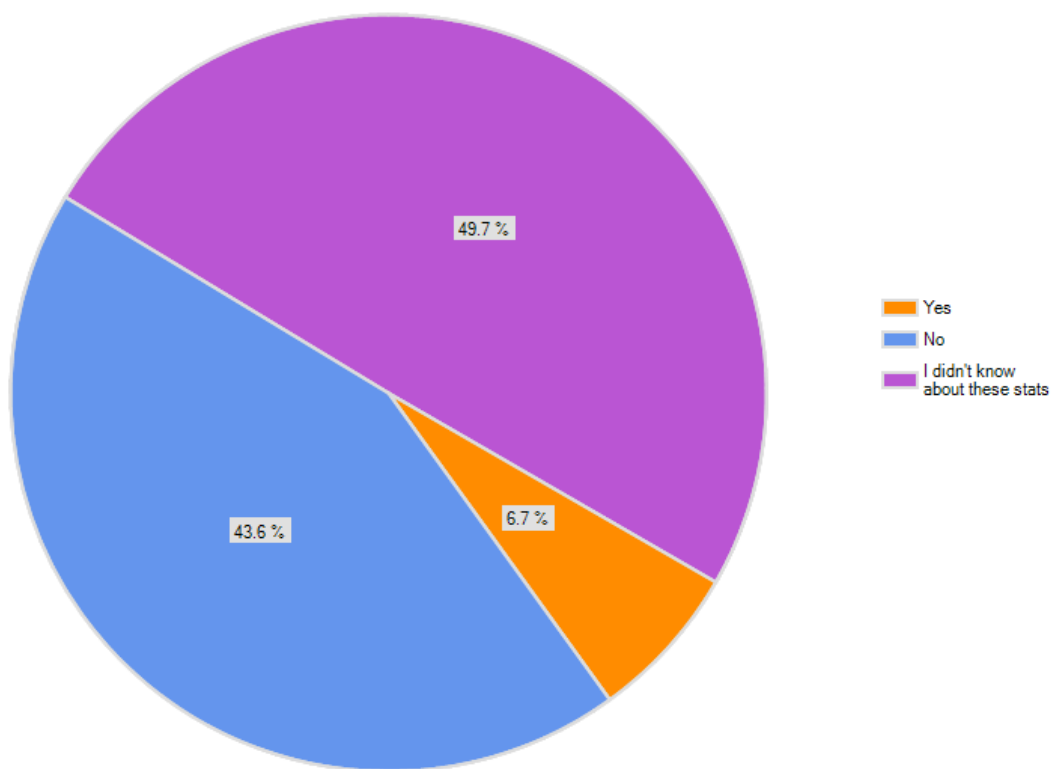
The challenge is how Universities will provide a more efficient, but higher-quality education with an anticipated cut in teaching staff and overall budget.



Universities might do well by providing access to online training as an added-value proposition. It could be easier and cheaper than upgrading facilities and teaching staff. Online training could be a revenue stream for Universities short on funding.

Open-ended responses mostly featured responses associated with having a minimum number of tuition hours per week, having a better relationship with potential employers in the industry and improving how Universities generally prepare students for employment.

Did graduate employability figures offered on the Unistats website influence your decision to study a particular course at a University?



- Only 6.7% of graduates were influenced by the published graduate employability figures offered on the Unistats website. (<http://unistats.direct.gov.uk>)
- 43.6% said that they would not be influenced by the published Unistats graduate employability figures
- Whilst almost 50% said they didn't even know about these statistics!

Comment:

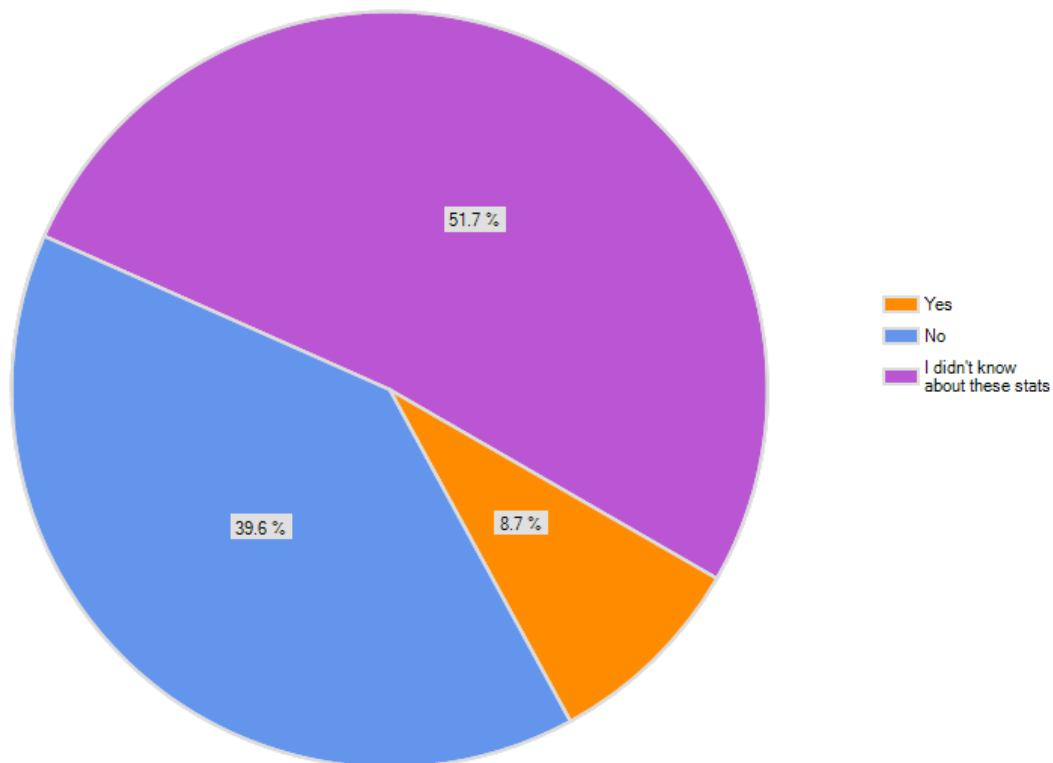
It's relevant to note that as much as one in two students weren't even aware of the published Unistats graduate employability figures. This could be seen as a benefit by the poorer performing Universities and



Colleges as students are not aware of these performance statistics which would typically influence decision-making.

We'd need to ask if 43.6% of our students would not be influenced by graduate employability figures then what is influencing their decision-making?

Did published student satisfaction figures offered on the Unistats website influence your decision to study a particular course at a University?



- Only 8.7% of graduate's decision to study a particular course was influenced by the published student satisfaction figures on the Unistats website.
- 39.6% said that there figures would not influence their decision-making.
- And 51.7% said that they didn't even know about these statistics...

Comment:

Again, it appears that more than 50% of all students weren't even aware of these statistics which are published on the Unistats website.



One would naturally expect that the top-performing Universities and Colleges would be using the published statistics to their advantage whilst poor performing Universities would be avoiding these statistics entirely.

Students looking to enrol on a particular Degree course should be checking both statistics and use this information to aid their decision-making.

Section 2 – Job Prospects and Career options

Only 9.3 % of graduates found a job in their chosen career, 17.3% settled for a non-ideal industry job and 51.3% had no option but to take a job outside of their field of study.

So, one in ten graduates actually found a job in their chosen career... Almost 20% were forced to take a non-ideal industry job and more than half were forced to take a job outside their field of study. It's no surprise that students are revolting.

These figures are alarming. However, we'd like to see comparative research for similar professions to determine if this is common to all 2009/10 UK graduates due to the global economic slow down or if these figures are specifically unique to art and design graduates only.

The exceptionally low number of 2009/10 Art and Design graduates who found their ideal job upon graduating compared with the exceptionally high number forced to working in industries unrelated to their field of study correlates with the 77.6% of graduates who, with hindsight, would re-consider a University education, particularly if tuition fees increase to the levels announced in 2011.

30% launched a freelance career and 5.3% set-up their own business

The UK Design Council Design Industry Insights Report (2010) and the Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey (2009) indicates that there's been a 39% growth in the number of registered freelance businesses in the UK since 2005. If this is the case, then why do 61.2% of graduates feel that their University or College did not adequately prepare them for working as freelancers or creative business owners? Creative freelancing, as a career option, has grown almost 40% in 5 years yet the majority of Universities aren't helping students prepare for such trends and developments which influence a graduate's ability to find paid employment.

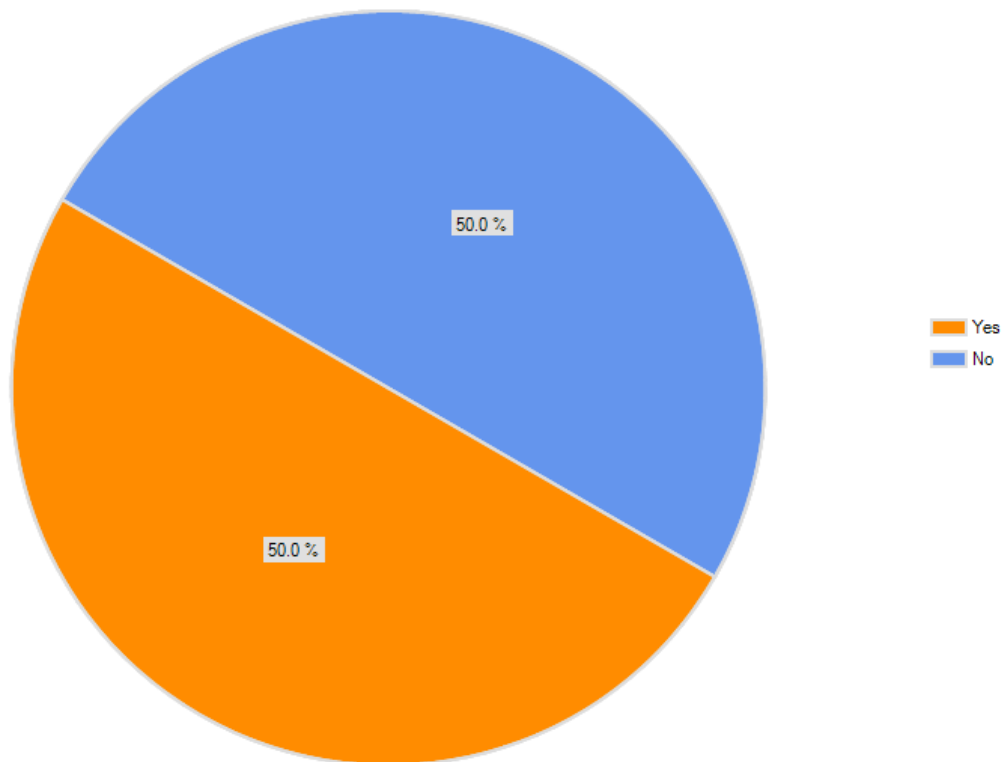


50% worked as paid freelancers whilst they were studying...

Surely, if 50% of students worked as paid freelancers whilst still studying, then Universities and Colleges would do well by teaching 1st and 2nd year students how to successfully freelance? This type of training should be introduced and introduced sooner into the curriculum.

The employment landscape in the UK creative industry has shifted due to technology, changes in the industry as well as the current economic climate. Have Universities adapted to these changes?

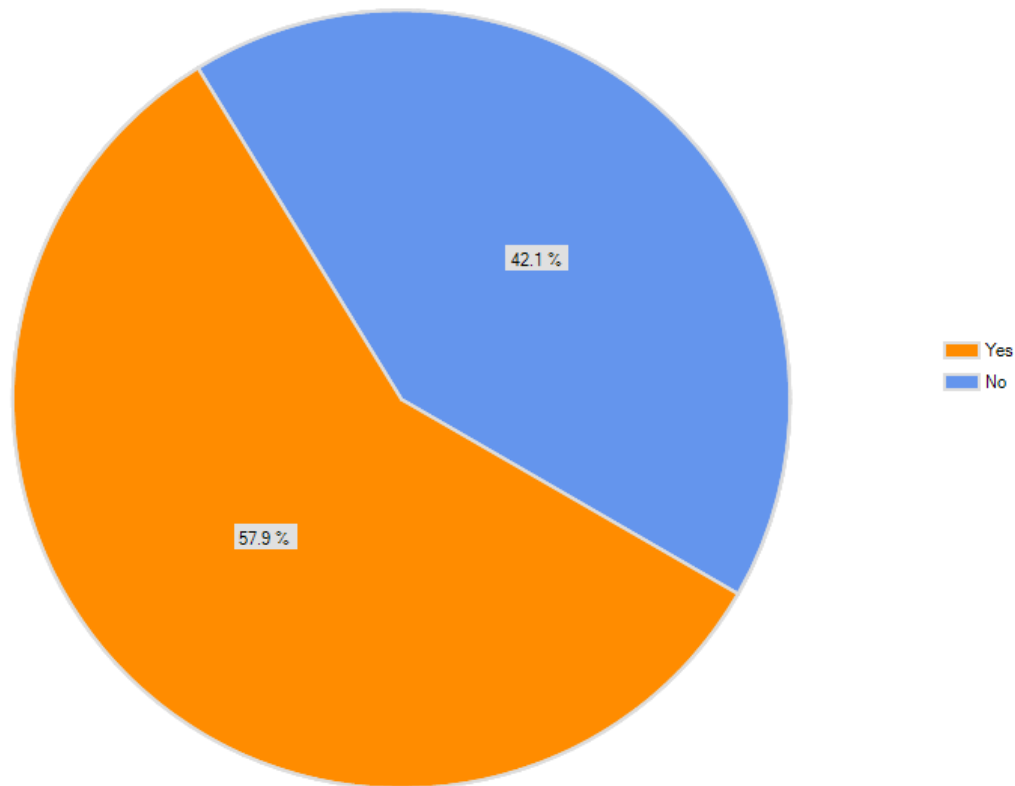
Did you do any paid freelance work whilst you were still a student? (ie. Photography, Design, Illustration, Animation etc.)



- 50% of graduates engaged in paid freelance work whilst they were still studying.



Have you freelanced since you graduated?



- 56% of 2009/10 graduates have freelanced since they graduated.

Comment:

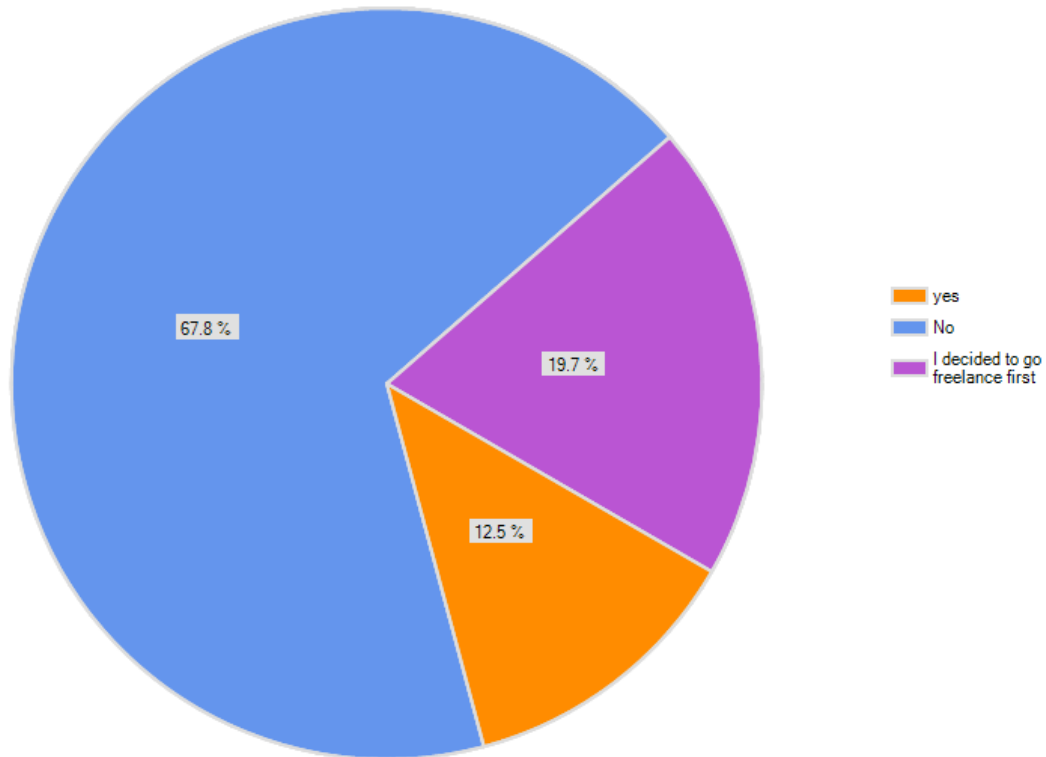
This is compelling evidence that Universities and Colleges should be helping their creative arts students prepare for freelance working as a career option in the creative industry. It is evident that a graduate is no longer guaranteed a job at a creative agency (or in-house) immediately after graduating.

This insight ties into the fact that the 2010 UK Design Council Insights Survey indicates that there's been a 39% growth in the number of UK registered freelance businesses since 2005.

If this is the case, then why did 46% of our graduates not receive any formal advice or training from their University or College to help them prepare for freelance working? Have Universities kept abreast of the employment trends and changes in the industry?



Have you set up your own creative business since you graduated or perhaps whilst you were still a student?



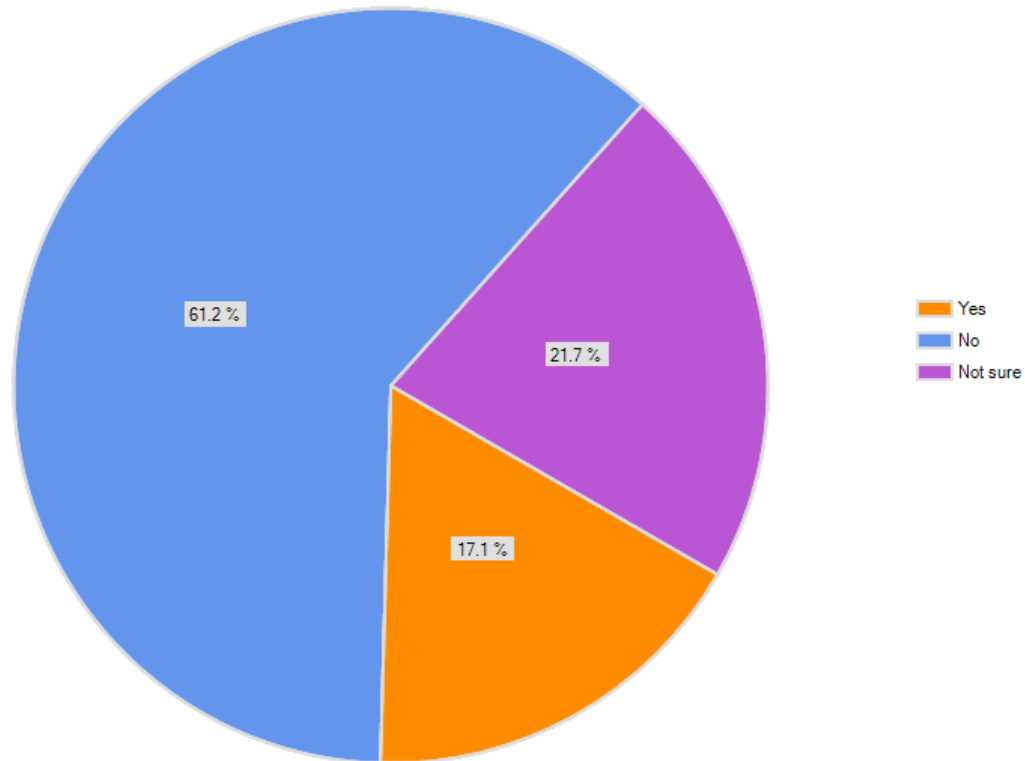
- 19.7% of graduates have launched themselves as paid freelancers since graduating.
- 12.5% have set themselves up in their own creative businesses (i.e. entrepreneurs!)
- Collectively, 32.2% of graduates are either freelancing or own their own creative businesses soon after graduating.

Comment:

One-third of 2009 and 2010 creative arts graduates are now actively employed as freelancers or have set themselves up as creative business owners. Universities should be doing more to encourage and support creative entrepreneurship as these businesses will eventually start to employ staff, pay Corporation Tax, National Insurance, VAT, help alleviate youth unemployment and invent and design products that will help shape the UK in the future.



Did you feel that your College or University adequately prepared you for launching your career as a freelancer or a creative biz owner?



- 61.2% of graduates felt that their University or College did not adequately prepare them for launching their careers as freelancers or creative business owners.
- Only 17.1% said that they felt that their University or College adequately prepared them for these career options.

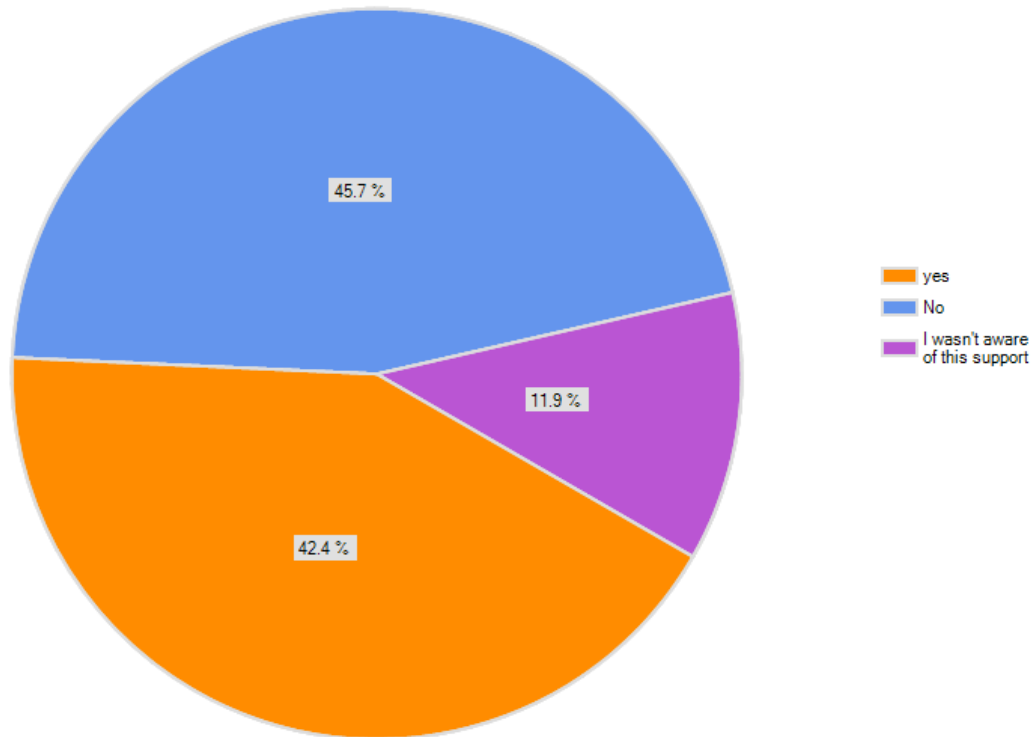
Comment:

It's evident that Universities and Colleges need to adapt their student employability and creative entrepreneurship programs. Whilst almost one in five students felt that they were adequately prepared, almost one third weren't adequately prepared for working freelance or setting up their own creative businesses.

Universities need to adapt and make sure that creative graduates know that they are no longer guaranteed their ideal job as soon as they graduate and that they'll more than likely have to engage in paid freelance work, take a non-ideal job that's in the industry in order to get a foot in the door or launch their own creative businesses.



Did you receive any formal advice or training from your University or College in order to set yourself up as a freelancer or to launch and manage your own creative business?



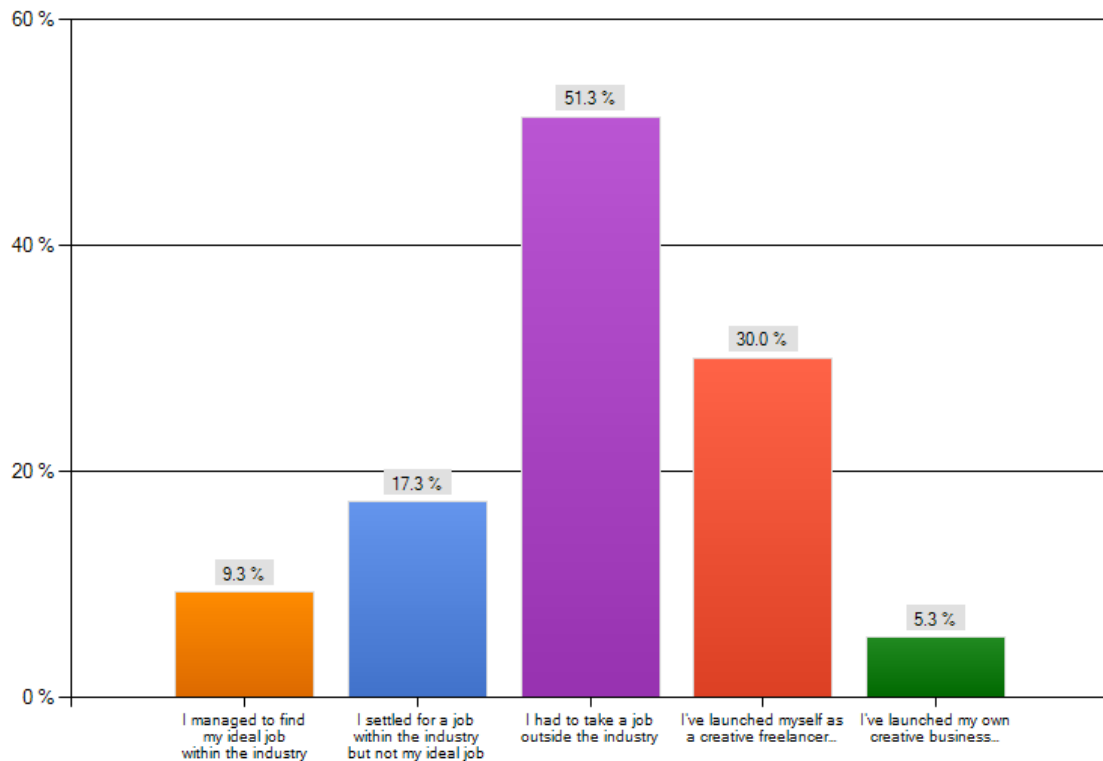
- 45.7% of graduates did not receive any formal advice or training from their University or College in order to help them prepare for working freelance or owning their own creative business.
- 12% said that they weren't aware of this support. It might have been available but they did not know about it.

Comment:

If 33% of 2009/10 creative arts graduates are currently freelancing or have set themselves up in their own creative businesses then why do almost half of all graduates mention that they received no formal advice or training in this regard? How are UK Universities and Colleges preparing their graduates for employment? Perhaps students are not being offered the full picture? If one third are not employed in a typical agency job then surely students should be trained and prepared for the alternatives?



Did you manage to find the job of your choice after graduating or were you forced to accept alternative jobs, work freelance, work in other unrelated sectors etc?



10

- 51.3% of graduates were forced to take a job outside of the creative industry since graduating.
- 30% have launched themselves as creative freelancers.
- And 5.3% have launched their own creative businesses.
- So, comparatively, 35.3% are now either freelancers or creative business owners.
- Only 9.3% managed to find their ideal job within the creative industry...
- This question produced the most free-form responses (34).

Comment:

Current 1st year students will be alarmed to know that 3 years spent studying a Creative Arts Undergraduate Degree whilst racking up student loan and personal debt and you've only got a one in ten chance of finding your ideal job within your chosen field when you graduate...

Then, if you're a little less lucky, you're the one in five graduates who manage to find themselves having to work in a non-ideal job but within the industry. But the unluckiest are the one in two graduates that had to take a job outside of the industry... How easy is will it be for them to eventually break into the industry?



Perhaps some of this is purely by choice, but we'd hazard a guess that most of these graduates have been forced to take a job outside the creative industry due to the current economic climate and overall job prospects for graduates in the UK creative industry.

It's evident that there are too many creative graduates and not enough 1st-time jobs available to graduates each year. One would need to ask how many of the graduates currently working outside the industry will eventually find employment in the creative industry as opposed to never working within the industry?

If less than 10% of graduates manage to find their ideal job within the industry then Universities should be helping students prepare for this fact. Only the top students with the strongest portfolios and interview and communication skills will find their ideal job. Competition for the good jobs is fierce and further competition comes from highly-qualified European and foreign graduates.

Interestingly enough, one can identify a poor written communication skills trend within the open-ended responses. Are creative arts students being taught written and verbal communication skills? How can one expect to land a decent job or an interview if you demonstrate a poor grasp of English and battle to write a covering letter? Perhaps Universities and Colleges should be teaching soft skills such as written communication, interview techniques, preparing for interviews, overall business awareness etc.



Section 3 – Blended learning and alternate training options

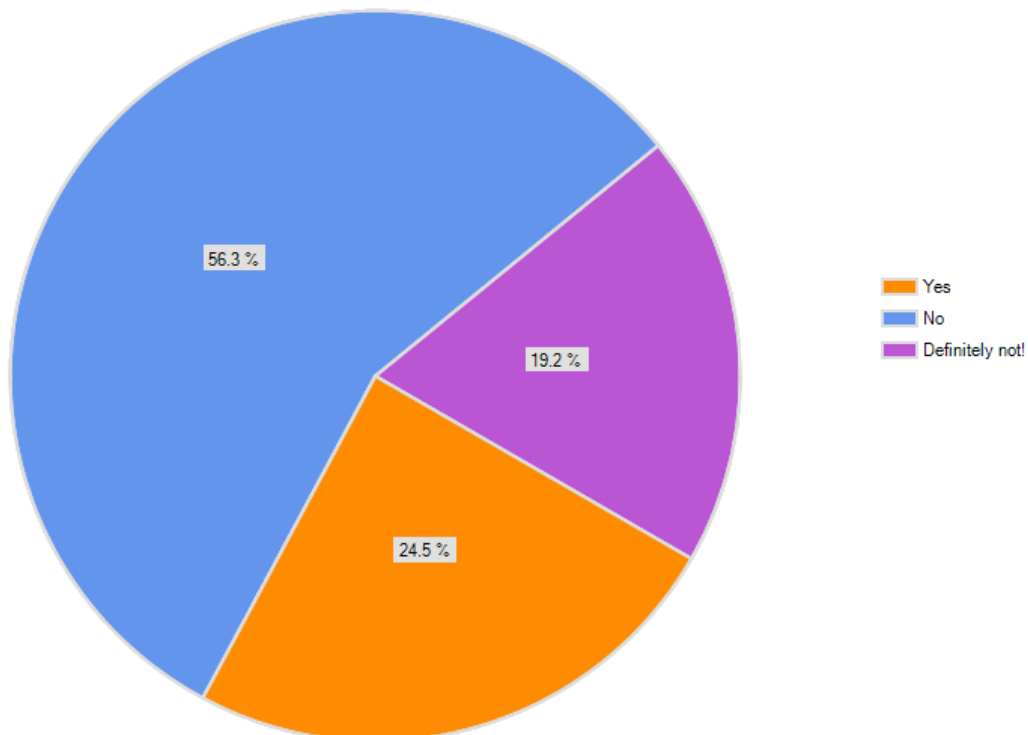
76% of graduates felt that their University or College did not provide them with a cutting-edge blended learning experience.

The rise in tuition fees coupled with modern e-learning technologies and access to online training plus the growth of distance learning as an income generator for Universities should provide greater opportunity for blended learning to become a key component of a University education, whether on site or off.

The traditional University model needs to adapt and adapt fast. The rise in the launch of private Universities and Business Schools offering a blend of online training and classroom-based tuition will begin to pose a real threat to traditional ‘bricks and mortar’ Universities.

With the proposed tuition fee increases the quality of teaching, services, support and value-for-money is under the spotlight. State Universities will find that they have to develop more contemporary models or partner and collaborate with the private sector.

In your opinion, did your University provide you with a cutting-edge blending learning experience? (Blended learning is a combination of traditional lectures and online education)





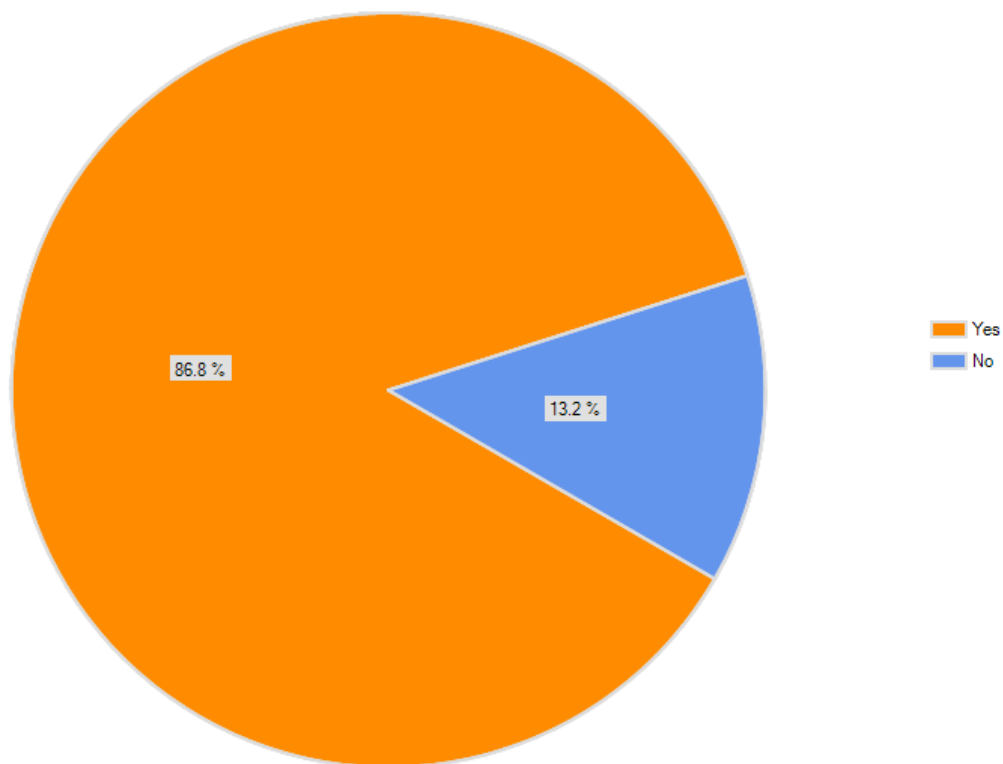
- 76% of graduates felt that their University or College did not provide them with a cutting-edge blended learning experience.

Comment:

It appears that the majority of UK Higher Education institutions still need to implement effective blended learning programmes and are still relying on the traditional classroom model . Blended learning will allow Universities to reduce teaching and support staffing, reduce reliance on bricks and mortar resources whilst also reducing their overall carbon footprint (less travel, fewer car journeys etc.)

It would be interesting to run the same research with US creative arts graduates to determine how many US Universities are seen to provide a cutting-edge blended learning experience.

Would you take advantage of creative entrepreneurship online training courses that were offered by your University free-of-charge?



- 87% of graduates said that they would take advantage of creative entrepreneurship online training courses if they were offered by their Universities or College’s free-of-charge.

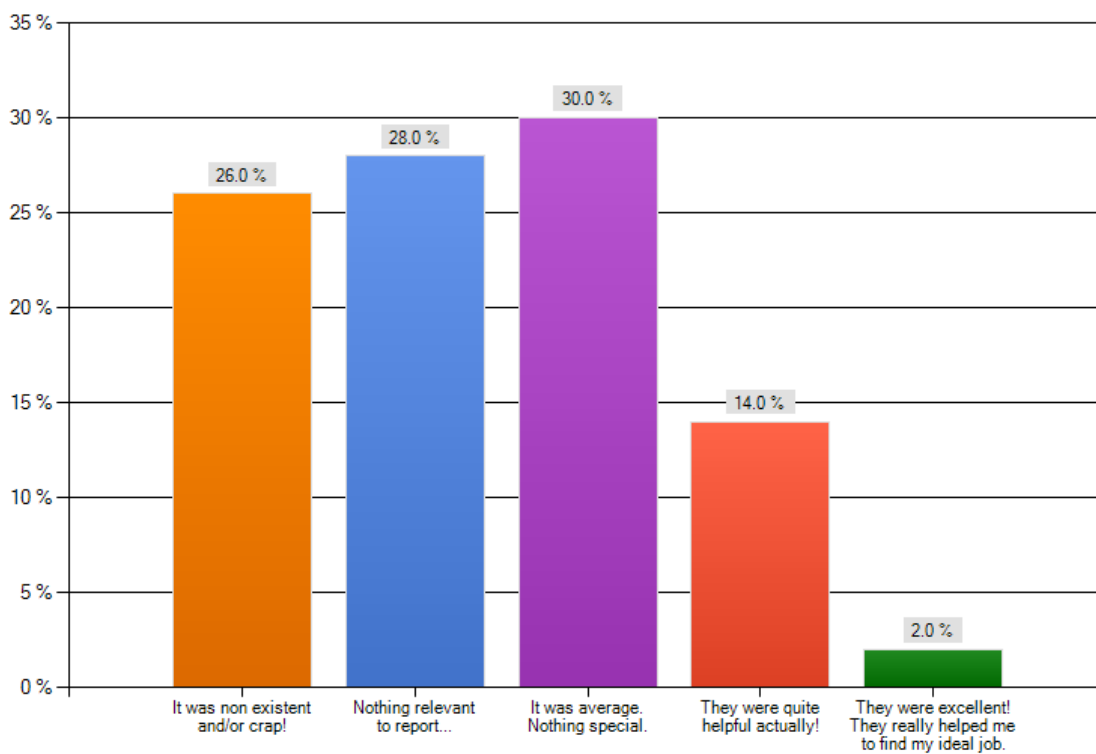


Comment:

This represents compelling evidence that Universities can take advantage of graduate employability online training courses and almost 90% of students would take advantage of the training offered.

Universities would do well to offer online training as a value-add service whilst helping to prepare their graduates for the prospect of freelance working or creative business ownership.

Please rate the service/support you received from your University or College Careers Department.



- Only 16% of graduates rated the service and support from their University or College Careers Department as 'quite helpful' or 'excellent'.
- 26% rated the service as non-existent or very poor
- 54% rated the service as non-existent, very poor and having nothing relevant to report in terms of service and support.

Comment:

If only 16% rated the service and support from their Careers Department then what are the other 84% receiving ?



We'd need to ask how easy is it to access career support and guidance and how current and relevant the support being offered by most UK Universities and Colleges is. Is there a reason students are staying away? Perhaps there aren't enough qualified staff and appointments are hard to come by?

In general, Universities need to be doing more to help graduates prepare for employment within the UK creative industry as the majority of students will not be lucky enough to land their ideal job in the creative industry.

Comments & Recommendations / Summary

- *Due to the proposed rise in tuition fees, UK Universities and Colleges will experience increased competition from foreign Universities offering high quality Degrees at a fraction of the price.*
- *The market will eventually force the poorer-value courses (those with high fees and low student satisfaction and graduate employability statistics) to close their doors, whilst the high-performing courses will naturally enjoy increased applications and therefore competition for the number of students accepted each year.*
- *Universities need to be helping students prepare for the various types of employment, and go beyond the typical agency- type interview and agency job prospect. It's evident that the employment landscape has shifted and Universities need to adapt to the changes in the landscape.*
- *Universities can benefit from offering third party online training as a value-added and/or revenue generation service. Some 75.5% of respondents indicated that their University or College did not provide them with a cutting-edge blended learning experience, whilst 86.8% said they would take advantage of the training if offered free-of-charge.*
- *Perhaps Universities need to explain why they're raising their fees in a more student-friendly way and there's a chance that the average student is not fully aware of what financial support is available?*
- *The overall state of graduate employability within the UK creative industry coupled with the costs of attending University for students from poorer backgrounds will more than likely result in a significant drop in students from poorer backgrounds studying Art & Design degrees.*
- *According to guidelines published by the Office for Fair Access (Offa), Universities in England wanting to charge fees of £9,000 per year could have to spend £900 of that income on access for poorer students. This would include fee subsidies and outreach projects.*
- *"We are now entering uncharted territory and none of us can predict exactly how the new higher fees will affect student behaviour. There is a real risk that disadvantaged students in particular will start to feel they cannot go to University." comments Martin Harris, Offa's Director.*



Appendix 1: Sound bytes from open-ended comments

What should Universities be doing to justify their tuition fee hikes?

Have more connection with the Industry and teach relevant skills as oppose to just creative skills, e.g. business, marketing, self promotion, networking etc.

Increase teaching hours, better prepare students for their careers, more placement opportunities.

Guaranteed minimum number of hours tuition per week.

Upgrade the standard of education tenfold. This means increasing the hours of education per week to a reasonable level (not just 3 hours in year 3 as I had) and ensure experienced staff.

Students don't recognise where the money is going, it may help to explain in a student friendly way.

Provide more one- to-one time with lecturers, subsidised food, materials etc

Offer lots of opportunities to gain the experience needed to find a job after graduation.

Reduce costs of course materials / provide a basic materials pack once a year

Did you feel that your College or University adequately prepared you for launching your career as a freelancer or a creative biz owner?

No business information at all and very little careers advice...

My school is really indifferent to their students' future and offered no opportunities.

They can only do so much as you have to work it out for yourself -though scheduled talks with a Career Officer each year may help all students!

Course taught some basics and knowledge, but lacked in general technical training and business skills.

Did you receive any formal advice or training from your University or College in order to set yourself up as a freelancer or to launch and manage your own creative business?

Only token gestures, when a large part of why I chose the course was because there was meant to be help in doing so.

Yes, but this had nothing to do with my course and was a separate initiative.

No information on how to set yourself up freelancing or on how to run your own creative business!

I found the help we received very selective.

Only because I took a 10 week business start-up module, not a lot was provided through lectures/tutorials.

We had just one lesson in 3 years about freelancing and launching a business.



Some basic information in the third year, but more could have been done.

Yes, but not enough... It needed to be run throughout the course instead of the last couple of weeks at the end of the course.

The quality of it was very poor.

I was offered business grants and information but not specific freelance information.

I was giving a little support but there wasn't enough training or advice to be able to set up as a freelancer.

In your opinion, did your University provide you with a cutting-edge blending learning experience? (Blended learning is a combination of traditional lectures and online education)

It was starting to with Add-vantage modules which you would take in addition to your Degree but they didn't go far enough.

No online lectures.

The teaching was almost non-existent in UEL.

Not the best online resources, only handouts and notices.

Would you take advantage of creative entrepreneurship online training courses that were offered by your University free-of-charge?

Definitely if it was provided!!!!

I wouldn't trust any free stuff as I have learned from my previous school that everything need to pay, even language support.

The systems were unreliable and often the access to the network was bad and not everyone can afford internet and access to it. Around campus, facilities were limited due to the amounts of students wanting a computer.

Possibly, it would be nice to have that extra choice and option! We have all paid enough for this option!

Did you manage to find the job of your choice after graduating or were you forced to accept alternative jobs, work freelance, work in other unrelated sectors etc?

Currently working part-time and doing an internship and volunteering. I've had my part-time job for 5 years, but its not really advancing me in my career.

I'm in the same part-time job and cannot find anything full-time

Unemployed but won't be looking for work within the creative industry

My degree did not prepare me at all well. I'm still searching. Terrible degree.

I had to be creative how I went about getting work.



I'm training to teach. I didn't have financial stability to allow for a loan to become a freelancer.

I'm only working part-time in retail which has nothing to do with my degree.

I'm in the process of developing my own creative business. Also looking for work outside the industry.

I am still looking for full- time work but have remained in the job that I was doing whilst studying.

No. Haven't even managed to get an admin job!

Have taken unpaid internship in creative industry.

I know I will end up in a job that's outside of my preferred industry for quite some time.

Same part-time job I had whilst studying.

I have applied for many internships and junior design jobs, but there are too many people attempting to get internships at the same time and all the junior jobs want experience regardless of the Degree.

Please rate the service/support you received from your University or College Careers Department.

I spent my BA course study in a small studio with three curtains divided and that was our 151 students' only studio. We wanted to access tutors urgently and they were telling me they are part-time employed by school.

No help at all.

There was one person within the art building for all courses, there were always jobs aimed at graphics, animation, automotive, product and design industry...very, very rarely fine art and visual art based job opportunities. University Careers Dept just tried to send us on temp jobs unrelated to the course to provide us with a small income. The main University Careers Dept had no creative industry jobs.

Haven't looked at this option because I wasn't really aware it was available.

Helpful. But trying to get appointments sometimes is a joke.

Advice only goes so far though, with the state of the arts sector at the moment, finding a career is not far from impossible.



Source credits

Unistats website

www.unitstats.org.uk

Design Industry Insights Report 2010

www.designcouncil.org.uk/industryresearch

University & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

www.ucas.ac.uk

Office for National Statistics (Labour Force Survey 2009)

www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase

Office for Fair Access (Offa)

www.offa.org.uk

Relevant news articles:

“British Students are learning that it pays to take their degree abroad.”

www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/mar/06/university--europe-no-debt?INTCMP=SRCH

“Fair access levy for universities.”

www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-12665503

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